

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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HOW TO MEDITATE

(Basic instructions, with an exercise in visualization)

INTRODUCTION Meditation is the science of reuniting the soul with Spirit.

The soul, descending from God into flesh, manifests its consciousness and life force through seven chakras, or centers of light, in man's cerebrospinal axis. (These are the "seven stars" and "seven churches" spoken of by St. John in the little-understood book of Revelation in the Bible.) Encased in the bodily prison, the soul consciousness and life force become identified with the physical vehicle and its mortal limitations. Scientific meditation awakens the soul consciousness in the seven cerebrospinal centers. In a state of divine recollectedness, the soul intuitively realizes its immortal nature and origin. The various progressive states of soul awakening are accompanied by an ever increasing accession of inner peace and joy. In the most exalted states, soul and Spirit become reunited in ecstatic, blissful communion, or samadhi.

By meditation, then, we connect the little joy of the soul with the vast joy of the Spirit. Meditation should not be confused with ordinary concentration. Concentration consists in freeing the attention from distractions and in focusing it on any thought in which one may be interested. Meditation is that special form of concentration in which the attention has been liberated from restlessness and is focused on God. Meditation is concentration used to know God.

POSTURE One of the first requisites for meditation is correct posture.

The spine should be erect. When the devotee is seeking to direct his mind and life force upward through the cerebrospinal axis to the centers of higher consciousness in the brain, he should avoid stricture or pinching of the spinal nerves caused by improper posture.

Those persons whose legs are supple may prefer to meditate sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor, or on a firm bed. However, Paramahansa Yogananda recommended for most Westerners the following meditation pose:

Sit on a straight armless chair with the feet resting flat on the floor. Hold spine erect, abdomen in, chest out, shoulders back, chin parallel to the

ground. The hands, with palms upturned, should rest on the legs at the juncture of the thighs and the abdominal region to prevent the body from bending forward. The meditation chair should be of comfortable height, otherwise there is a tendency to allow the torso to lean forward or backward. If the correct posture has been assumed, the body will be stable yet relaxed, so that it is easily possible to remain completely still, without moving a muscle.

Each of the foregoing details is a contributing factor toward the chief aim of the meditation posture--an erect spine, held stable without strain or tension for the duration of the meditation period. If, because of bad habits of posture or congenital defects of posture, you experience difficulty or discomfort in maintaining the specified positions of feet, hands, shoulders, chest, and abdomen, make whatever commonsense adjustments are necessary to your individual need; but strive always toward accomplishing the ideal posture recommended by Paramahansa Yogananda.

When you are established in the meditation pose, inhale slowly and deeply (through the nostrils) to a count of 20; hold the breath to a count of 20; exhale slowly (through the mouth) to a count of 20. Practice this six to twelve times. (A shorter count may be used, provided it is the same count in each of the three parts.) Then inhale, tensing the whole body and clenching the fists. Relax all the body parts at once and, as you do so, expel the breath through the mouth in a double exhalation, "huh, huh." Repeat this practice six times. Then forget the breath. Let it flow in and out naturally, of its own accord, as in ordinary breathing.

With the eyelids half closed (or completely closed, if this is more comfortable to you), look upward, focusing the gaze and the attention as though looking out through a point between the eyebrows. (A person deep in concentration often "knits" his brows at this spot.) Do not cross the eyes or strain them; the upward gaze comes naturally when one is relaxed and calmly concentrated. What is important is fixing the whole attention at the point between the eyebrows. This is the Christ Consciousness center, the seat of the single eye spoken of by Christ: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22). When the purpose of meditation is fulfilled, the devotee finds his consciousness automatically concentrated at the spiritual eye, and he experiences, according to his inner spiritual capacity, a state of joyous divine union with Spirit.

Making a steadfast effort, the beginner may in time perceive light, or even see the spiritual eye of three colors--a reflection of the actual luminous eye in the medulla oblongata (at the base of the skull where it joins the neck). This single eye of light reflected in the forehead is the astral eye of intuitive omnipresent perception. It takes deep concentration and calmness to behold the spiritual eye; a golden halo surrounding a circle of blue, in the center of which palpitates a five-pointed white star. Those who do see the spiritual eye

should strive to penetrate it by deeper concentration and by devoted prayer to God. The depth of calmness and concentration necessary for this are naturally developed through steady practice of the scientific SRF techniques of concentration and meditation (Lessons 21 and 29).

Whether you see the light of the spiritual eye or not, however, you should continue to concentrate at the Christ Consciousness center between the eyebrows, praying deeply to God and His great saints. In the language of your heart invoke their presence and their blessings. A good practice is to take an affirmation or a prayer from the Lessons, or from Paramahansa Yoganandaji's "Whispers from Eternity" or "Metaphysical Meditations," and spiritualize it with your own devotional yearning. Silently chant and pray to God, keeping the attention at the point between the eyebrows, until you feel God's response as calm, deep peace and inner joy.

VISUALIZATION Divine consciousness is omnipresent. In order to attune one's consciousness to it, it is necessary first to expand the mind by meditation on some aspect of God's infinite nature. Visualization is not realization; but visualization is an effective aid in deepening one's concentration, which is essential for the deep meditation that yields realization. The following exercise in visualization and mental expansion given by Paramahansa Yogananda will be found helpful in preparing the mind to practice the scientific techniques of meditation that are given in later Lessons:

"Sit upright. Focus your gaze and your mind at the Christ Consciousness center between the eyebrows. Fill your heart with joy. Behold! the sphere of darkness that you see with closed eyes is becoming a sphere of light and joy. This sphere is enlarging. Now it is bigger than your body. Go on expanding the sphere of joy and light. Your home and everyone in it are present in the sphere of light that you are beholding. Go on expanding it until you see your whole city in this sphere of light and joy. Ever increasing, the sphere of light and joy is encompassing the entire United States, and still it is expanding, including Europe, Asia, the world! See the world bathed in the light of this peaceful sphere of joy. The earth appears as a little ball moving in the vast sphere of light and joy. The sphere is becoming even larger; see! our planetary and stellar system, the Milky Way, and island galaxies, like little bubbles, are floating in it.

'Expand the sphere of light and joy within you, in which all things are moving, glimmering like the lights of a city. Meditate on and try to be one with that joy. God is joy, and we must find Him through joy. The scriptures say: 'Thou art That.' Your Self is one with this vast sphere of light that is your Father. You are this sphere of light and joy! Meditate on that. You have no boundaries--eternity above, below, everywhere. In this eternal sphere of light and joy all things are moving. Mentally affirm: 'In me worlds are floating like bubbles. I and my Father are One.'

"Now open your eyes. Look at the body and see how little it is! Close your eyes and realize again that you are not the body. You are the eternal sphere of light and joy in which all things have their being. Go on meditating, mentally affirming: 'I am the cosmic sphere of light, of joy, of love, in which worlds and universes are floating like bubbles. My Father is this cosmic sphere of light; my Father and I are One. I am not the body; I am the eternal sphere of light. Aum. Aum. Amen.'"

(Paramahansa Yogananda cautioned devotees against the erroneous thought, "I am God." One should realize, rather, "God has become myself." The soul is like a wave on the sea-bosom of Spirit. The soul wave is one with the Sea, but the wave is not the Sea.)

Through daily practice of the foregoing instructions, you can prepare yourself for the practice of the basic techniques of concentration and meditation that are given in later Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons. These scientific techniques will enable you to dive ever more deeply in the great ocean of God's presence. We all exist at this very moment in that ocean of Spirit; but only by steadfast, devoted, scientific meditation may we consciously perceive that we are individualized soul waves on the vast ocean of God's bliss.

The meditation period should last at least thirty minutes in the morning and thirty minutes at night. The longer you sit, enjoying the state of meditative calm, the faster you will progress spiritually. Carry into your daily activities the calmness you feel in meditation; that calmness will help you to bring harmony and happiness into every department of your life.

Unending joy awaits the sincere truth seeker who conscientiously meditates each day. Through the grace of God, through the blessings of the Masters, and through your own devotional effort you can achieve the state of divine joy experienced by all saints that have become established in the Lord (that have become consciously aware of their soul unity with Spirit).

KEY POINTS

1. Set aside a regular time and place for your daily practices of the spiritual techniques taught by Self-Realization Fellowship. Try to find a quiet place where you can be free from outside distractions and thus be able to concentrate with more intensity. If possible, never use that place for any other purpose than meditation. Thus you will impregnate the spot with spiritual vibrations that will help you to make each day's meditation deeper than the meditation of the preceding day. You may have there a small altar with the pictures of Christ, Krishna, and the Gurus of Self-Realization Fellowship.

2. Always begin and end your meditation with a prayer, such as: "Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Sri

Yuktaswarji, Guru Preceptor Paramahansa Yogananda, saints of all religions, I bow to you all. Free my life from all obstacles of delusion, and lead me to Thy shores of fulfillment." Or, "May Thy love shine forever on the sanctuary of my devotion, and may I be able to awaken Thy love in all hearts."

3. Early morning, upon arising, and the period just before retiring at night are excellent times for meditation. Do not try to meditate just after eating. Wait at least an hour if possible. The kind of food one eats also has a definite bearing on one's health or ill health, not only of the body but of the mind. Be sure the diet includes an abundance of fresh vegetables and fruits. Eat nuts, cheese, eggs, and vegetable proteins in preference to meat. Fruits are the most spiritually beneficial of all foods.

4. It is good to use a woolen blanket or silk cloth (or both, with the silk on top) to cover your meditation seat. Drape the cloth over the back of the chair if a chair is used, and place one end of the cloth on the floor under your feet. The cloth helps to insulate the body from subtle earth currents. Their magnetic downward pull toward material perceptions is undesirable for the meditating devotee. The yogis have found, also, that facing East (the direction from which subtle spiritual solar currents are always flowing) is helpful in meditation.

5. Bathing has a cleansing effect not only on the body but also on the mind, and is therefore a beneficial practice before meditation. Bathing opens the pores allowing toxins to escape; it also helps to distribute life energy evenly throughout the body, quieting the nerves and inducing calmness. One should also take a "mental bath" before meditation: put aside all worries and problems. Completely give to God the time you have set aside for meditation. Concentrate on one of His infinite aspects--Peace, Joy, Wisdom, Love, Light, Beauty--or on a personal aspect, such as that of the ever-loving, all-forgiving Divine Mother. Many devotees find inspiration by meditating on divine incarnations of God such as Christ and the Masters. Reading a devotional passage from "Whispers from Eternity" or "Metaphysical Meditations" or singing a devotional song from "Cosmic Chants" helps to uplift the mind. Meditation in itself is an unequaled "spiritual bath"--a cleansing and rejuvenation of body, mind, and soul.

6. Practice of the Self-Realization Fellowship Energization Exercises--and also certain yoga asanas (body postures)--is beneficial in preparing the body for deep meditation. The life forces in the body are harmonized by these relaxing and calming methods, and one's attention is freed from aches and pains and from the drowsiness or restlessness that keep the mind sense bound and body conscious.

Be regular in your meditations (whether they be deep, or, in the beginning, restless). Be persistent if you would attract God's attention. Remember that meditation should be practiced with devotion, with real love for God.

Paramahansaji has said that love for God means craving for God. He cannot resist the magnetic attraction of human soul yearning. Meditation techniques help you to awaken and whet that divine craving which will take you to the heights of realization, of soul union with God-Bliss. Resolve that you will never give up until He comes to you. Whether you realize it or not, He is listening to the cry of your heart. In His own time He will bestow the supreme gift of Himself.